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# Knight Rose Croix and Its Inner Order

BY R. STEPHEN DOAN, 33°, PGM

Many Masonic degrees beyond the first three and the Royal Arch can be traced back to French Masonic Christian knighthood. These were inspired by the Scottish and Jacobite exile, Chevalier Andrew Michael Ramsay, who wrote in his *1736 Discourse on Masonry's Origins*:[1]

> Sometime . . . [after the time of the Crusades in Palestine] our Order formed an intimate union with the Knights of St John of Jerusalem… . This union was made after the example set by the Israelites when they erected the second Temple, who whilst they handled the trowel and mortar with one hand, in the other held the sword and buckler.[2]

This statement increased the draw for French aristocratic Freemasons. Scottish manual laborers may have been involved in preserving and spreading Freemasonry, but according to the Scotsman Ramsay, its source was aristocratic and chivalric knighthood, then in vogue in France. While Ramsay wrote Knights of St. John of Jerusalem (a Hospitaller order) as the chivalric connection, his French readers understood this as code for the still officially banned Knights Templar, condemned by king and pope, and its last Grand Master Jacques DeMolay, who was burned at the stake.

Ramsay's Oration also reported that Masonry offered a "respectable bond to unite Christians of all nationalities in one confraternity." This statement provided his French readers with a useful rebuttal to Reverend James Anderson's religious requirement in his Constitutions, which was expanded "to that Religion in which all Men agree."[3] France was in 1736 a wholly Roman Catholic country, and French Freemasons welcomed the permission Ramsay granted for them to make Masonry overtly Christian and Catholic.

As a result of Ramsay's discourse, French Masonic degrees proliferated with chivalric and Christian themes. These new grades were referred to as Scottish or *Écossais* Masonry because they were inspired by Scottish Jacobite exiles in France. Among the purposes of the core higher degrees, two stand out: rebuild the temple and find the lost master's word, both in a chivalric and Christian context.

The eventual reaction to this flood of new degrees was an effort to limit their number and choose a capstone degree. This proved difficult as Masons differed on which degrees were essential to retain and which should be the capstone– with the final lessons to become a Perfect Mason, that is, one who possesses the complete set of tools necessary for the practice of his speculative craft. *Knight Kadosh*, invented in 1743 by the Masons of Lyon, was a popular degree because of its close identification with the Knights Templar, which Ramsay inferred was the source of Freemasonry. However, not every Mason was convinced that degree about the re-ascendence, or vengeance, of the Templars, should be the capstone or ultimate degree of Freemasonry. For most, vengeance was not seen as a virtue. Another candidate for capstone was the *Knight of the Sun*, which first appeared in France around 1750 in the Scottish Philosophical Rite of the Scottish Mother Lodge of Marseille. It was one of France's most influential lodges, in part because of its location as an important trading hub, with many visiting Masons attending this lodge when passing through the port. In the pre-Pike form of this

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# A Note from the Editor

One of the most exciting aspects of Freemasonry is that it stokes the imagination and leads a seeker through biblical scripture and mythology to a personal interaction or experience. Although some may presently consider this to be a bit anachronistic or exotic, to our 18th-century brethren it was not unique or unknown. As Illustrious R. Steven Doan, 33° describes certain high degrees such as the Knight Rose Croix were designed as a reinterpretation of the perspectives and practices of religious confraternities that had their origins in the Middle Ages, and even earlier. These authors, through established spiritual and chivalric traditions such as the Knights Templar, not only created new degrees, but additional ones, or inner orders, for the elite initiate that articulated a connection to Masonic, Christian, and, ultimately, perennial wisdom.

But it was not just the imitation of these traditions which fascinated those 18th and 19th century Masons. Through the lens of a particular political and religious climate, there was an attempt to re-imagine a personal, initiatic, mystical connection with a spiritual doctrine whose origins were part and parcel of Christianity and the ne plus ultra of all ancient initiatic traditions. Arguably, Anderson's "…that religion to which all men agree" indicated for these ritualists and mystics something much different than what we might interpret today. And why should that not be so? A fascinating and diverse creativity was the hallmark of Freemasonry during the long 18th and 19th centuries, giving rise to expressions that may not be recognizable to current practices (or even to those of that era!). As a result, a galaxy of Masonic traditions and interpretations have been transmitted for emulation, revelation, and examination. Studying them will provide important insights into cultural, political, and religious trends that echo even into the present era.

## Letters & Submissions

If you would like us to consider an original, unpublished, scholarly article of 2,500–4,000 words for publication in *The Plumbline*, please send us a query via email to AKendall@ScottishRite.org including the following information: name, address, Masonic affiliation (if any), contact information (telephone and email). Please also include a short summary—one paragraph or less—of your article including the title, subject, and the theme of the piece. We will respond to queries promptly, and authors of articles we are interested in will be asked to forward their entire manuscript to us electronically. * **Please direct all letters to the editor, comments or concerns to AKendall@ScottishRite.org** *

degree, each Craft lodge symbol is revisited from two perspectives: philosophical (mankind's search for wisdom) and moral (the principles or standards of right conduct; virtue).[4] This dual approach to symbols helps each disentangle our search for Truth and learning to subdue our passions while simultaneously working on both. While Knight of the Sun was the capstone degree in some French lodges, it was too esoteric for many Masons to be the last word. For still other Masons, the capstone was *Knight Rose Croix*.

Although a Masonic use of the words Rosy Cross appeared in 1741 in a document of the Harodim Grand Lodge in London,[5] its reference was to a degree now practiced by the Royal Order of Scotland, which is more Rosicrucian than *Rose Croix* as we understand these terms today. The title Rose Croix appeared in 1757 in France on the diploma for a Brother Targe, indicating his grade as *Chevalier de l'Orient et Rose-Croix* (Knight of the East and Rose-Cross).[6] While Rosicrucianism and Knight Rose Croix were both inspired by *The Fama Fraternitatis of the Meritorious Order of the Rosy Cross* (1614) and the terms have sometimes been used interchangeably, each system matured into distinct, separate forms. Their only commonality is the role of Jesus as an exemplar, the rose and cross as an emblem, and (most telling of the common Rosicrucian heritage) a single cabalistic word ultimately understood by some to be the true word of a Christian Mason.

By the time a candidate arrived at the Knight Rose Croix in the French system, he already had discovered the lost master's word, which English and American Masons now find in the Royal Arch degree. In Knight Rose Croix, the candidate begins another search, this time for the ultimate True Word of a Christian Mason, a word not known to King Solomon because of events following his reign. In the Rose Croix degree, the candidate learns that this True Word and what it will require of him can be found only by living the theological virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity from 1 *Corinthians* 13, in addition to the cardinal virtues from Plato's *Republic*: temperance, fortitude, prudence, and justice. The candidate also learns that there have been many martyrs in the search for Truth and that he must demonstrate a strength of character to do that which is right even if others fail to do so– even if it could result in his death.

This new Knight Rose Croix degree offered important insights, discoveries, and experiences:

- ✠ **It reimaged the 3rd-degree allegory of death, burial, and raising in the Christian context.**
- ✠ **The insightful knight could come to understand that Hiram Abif foreshadowed Christ and that future existence after death will be in that temple of perfection, that house not made with hands.**
- ✠ **The candidate learned a True Word of a Christian Mason.**
- ✠ **Freemasonry is a confraternity whose spiritual dimension is enriched by a communion ceremony embedded in the degree.**

The degree thus developed with the following "perfect points of entrance," (to borrow from a familiar Masonic phrase) that is, the set of actions or points required for the degree to be complete or "perfect":

1. **We learn that finding the True Word of a Christian Mason requires the new law of Christianity, including the theological virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity, which take us beyond the cardinal virtues from Plato's *Republic*: temperance, fortitude, prudence, and justice.**
2. **In our quest for the True Word of a Christian Mason, we must go to the darkest place imaginable by revisiting the death, descent, and resurrection of Christ. We might come to understand how this journey parallels the experience we had when we joined the Hiram Abiff allegory during our raising.**
3. **At the end of this journey, we discover the True Word of a Christian Mason (this is the cabalistic word revealed in the degree, but it also could appear as "Emmanuel," "the Word," "*Logos*," or "Geometry") when the cubic stone [that the builder rejected] is changed into the mystic rose [representing Jesus].[7]**
4. **We partake of communion in a Masonic context.**

Note the similarities of these "perfect points of entrance" to those actions in the historic 18th degree of the Southern Masonic Jurisdiction of the Scottish Rite.

As with some other French Masonic Christian chivalric degrees, Knight Rose Croix closes with a communion service. Ramsay encouraged this practice by describing Freemasonry as a confraternity. What did confraternity mean to his audience? A widespread phenomenon in medieval Europe, a confraternity was a brotherhood with charitable, religious, or other benevolent purposes, such as helping one another and those in the community in times of need. A confraternity also encouraged virtuous conduct. They often met in a church where a

Representation of the floorcloth for the Knight of the Holy Supulchre.
Credit: Maçonnerie des Hommes Bd. IV, 187v., Kloss-MS XXIV; 240B56; Vrijmetselarij Museum, Netherlands

Catholic priest would celebrate Mass at the close of their meeting. Knight Rose Croix continues this legacy, not as a religious observance, but as an outward sign of the inner grace of friends and brothers "among whom no contention should ever exist, but that noble contention or rather emulation of who best can work and best agree."[8] It is a ceremony that, at its core, has the same intent and creates the same sense of well-being as the Chain of Union or Mystic Chain.

Rose Croix reinforces another lesson of the Master Mason degree: the importance of Wisdom and Courage. During our raising, each of us was asked to prove that we possessed the wisdom and courage to choose and pursue what is right, no matter the consequences, even death. That experience sets us apart. It creates a special bond among those who have experienced it. Knight Rose Croix allows the Christian Mason to experience his raising once again, but this time in the Christian context, vicariously through the passion, crucifixion, and resurrection of his savior. What better exemplar can there be for wisdom and courage for a Christian than Jesus?

Some Masons who favored Knight Rose Croix as the capstone degree of Continental Freemasonry found themselves tempted to add one more experience shared by brothers who belonged to a non-Masonic confraternity in Paris known as the Parisian Fraternity of the Holy Sepulchre. Although the group has gradually lessened its requirements, it was initially composed exclusively of pilgrims who had visited the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and, as a reward for their assistance in keeping the site Christian, made a Guardian Knight of the shrine–principally by the donations they made for the privilege of the visit. The pilgrims would arrive at the church before dusk and were locked in for the night by the Muslim guards. The pilgrims would take turns lying in the crypt, the last place on earth where their lord and savior had laid.[9] Just as Christians believe that taking the body and blood of Christ during communion unites them to His passion and the *Logos* or Word which was incarnate in Him, so did laying in His last resting place allow the pilgrim to share– at least for a moment– Christ's gateway to immortality and gnosis with the Divine.

Because no degree could be added above Knight Rose Croix if it were to be the capstone degree, any new degree had to be an "inner order." A Masonic Knight of the Holy Sepulchre degree appeared around 1760 essentially in that function to enhance the Knight Rose Croix experience. In it, the candidate becomes a Guardian Knight to protect the final resting place of Jesus, where the mysteries of life and the hereafter were revealed by His death and raising from that grave.

One of the earliest known French Sepulchre degree manuscripts is *Chevaliers du Saint Sépulcre*, likely written between 1765 and 1782.[10] The degree furnishings, lighting, and floorcloth are described as follows:

> The Chapter must be draped in red, the throne and the altar the same, and twenty lights should be placed in groups of 5 to create triangles [an emblem of the Holy Trinity] at the 4 corners of the floorcloth, which represents the tomb of Jesus Christ with an angel above who points to the sky with its index finger. In the north there is a representation of the closed grave, and on top is the sword of Godfrey de Bouillon, his spurs, and his collar. The collar must be golden, and at the end must hang the Cross of Jerusalem, also golden.[11]

> Everyone wears black with white gloves and aprons. When asked why those present are members of the Chapter of the Holy Sepulcher, the answer is: "To combat the enemies of the faith." When asked why they assemble in this holy location, the answer is: "For honor, strength, and wisdom."

Each candidate promises:

> to combat the enemies of the Catholic, Apostolic and Roman faith, to respect the prelates of the church, and to support the armies of my prince. And in the case that the Christian princes undertake a war, to combat enemies of our holy religion in the holy land. I oblige myself to assist in person, or in the case that I am impeded from doing so, to send another in my place; to hold my engagement, may God give me aid.[12]

The degree was thus overtly Roman Catholic, as were many of degrees of Masonic Christian knighthood in mid-eighteenth-century France.

After answering some questions about his background, the presiding officer (styled the Sovereign) Grand Master

> takes the sword of Godfrey of Bouillon which is an antique sword whose handle and guard are of silver-gold and holds it up, and pronounces the words: *adjutorium nostrum in nomine domini*. All the assembly drop to their right knees and respond: *salvum fac servum tuum*.[13]

Then,

> The Grand Master has the candidate kneel, and he puts his right hand on his head, and he says: Be a faithful and valiant soldier of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of the very holy sepulcher.

The candidate is presented with spurs, also representing those of Bouillon. The Grand Master then offers him the sword representing that of Bouillon, saying:

> Receive this sword in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit who will serve you when you lack this respectable assembly, in this place or another, and are among enemies of Christianity; speak in a low voice to not be overheard by 'profanes.'

The candidate then lowers his head onto the sepulcher and in this posture is knighted:

> I make you a Knight of the Holy Sepulchre, in the name of the Father,

the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The candidate then receives a golden chain, at the bottom of which hangs the jewel: the Cross of Jerusalem. The candidate then kisses the sepulcher.

In his *Masonic Encyclopedia*, George Kenning writes of the non-Masonic ceremony on which this degree is based: "Travelers tell us that the knighthood is conferred in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, with the sword of Godfrey de Bouillon."[14]

The degree ends with a lecture on Emperor Constantine's mother, St. Helene, who had the church of the Holy Sepulcher built, and her legendary founding of this order of Knights of the Holy Sepulchre:[15]

In the year 326, St. Helene had the church of the Holy Sepulcher built, for the first assembly of the Knights, and where they are still visiting to this day, this holy place. Coröes, having destroyed it in the sacking of Jerusalem, it was rebuilt in 618.[16] The Emperor Heraclius and St. John the Almoner, the patriarchs of Alexandria, contributed greatly; until it was brought to ruin again by a prince of Babylon and rebuilt by his own mother, who was a Christian. In 1009 it was enlarged by *l'empereur-consard* and ornamented by the French under Godfrey of Bouillon.

When St. Helene built this church, she created several Knights who were noble gentlemen to guard this place and other holy places. They had for their mark the distinctive gold Cross of Jerusalem, in which was contained five crosses, in memory of the five wounds of our Lord Jesus Christ. While this degree was overtly Roman Catholic, this manuscript did not include a communion ceremony.[17]

A Holy Sepulchre degree likely found its way from France to Ireland and thence to Scotland. The 24th degree in the Early Grand Encampment of Scotland is an early Sepulchre degree in English but without Catholic references, appearing circa the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century. This Scottish Sepulchre degree was expanded by Robert Wentworth Little in the 1860s for his Red Cross of Constantine, the only place where the degree is now practiced in English-speaking Masonry. In France, it may be found in the French Red Cross of Constantine and as number fifty in the eighty-one degree Metropolitan Chapter of France.

The degree of Holy Sepulchre offers another Masonic experience, unique to English and American Masons. Unlike the French and Scottish Rite Templary that focuses on Jacques de Molay and the Knights Templar organization's destruction, English and American Templar degrees do not mention de Molay. Still, they often include a reenactment of a pilgrimage to the Holy Sepulchre to lay where Jesus last laid. The Holy Sepulchre degree might be considered the Order of the Temple's inner order, thus giving further depth to the Templar experience! The Holy Sepulchre offers the opportunity to symbolically experience the pilgrims' reward: a visit to the Holy Sepulchre and the honor of being made one of this sacred shrine's Guardian Knights. However, that visit can be more than symbolic sightseeing and another Masonic title. For the Christian Mason, it can be a portal to a renewed spiritual union with Christ at His gateway to eternal life.[19]

## BIOGRAPHY

R. Stephen Doan, 33° is a Past Grand Master of Masons in California and a Past Venerable Master of the Lodge of Perfection in the Valley of Los Angeles. He is a Fellow of The Philalethes Society, of which he has served as President.

## ENDNOTES

1. Chevalier Andrew Michael Ramsay (9 July 1686 – 6 May 1743) wrote *Discourse pronounced at the reception of Freemasons by Monsieur de Ramsay, Grand Orator of the Order*, in which he connected Freemasonry with the Crusader Knights of St John of Jerusalem

2. The Scottish Rite 15th and the 16th degrees present Zerubbabel's return to Jerusalem from the Babylonian exile and the building of the second temple. These degrees were inspired in part by the following passage describing the building of the wall around Jerusalem to protect the second temple in *Nehemiah* 4:18 (ESV): "And each of the builders had his sword strapped at his side while he built." These two degrees are based on an English grade referred to as Scots Master, which was being conferred as early as 1733. It should be noted that the wall reported in Nehemiah was built some seventy years after the second temple was completed. This trowel and sword reference may also be found in some York Rite degrees, which include the building of the second temple.

3. Rev. James Anderson, D.D., *Anderson's Book of Constitutions*, 1723.

4. In the 1804 ritual of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite, the Philosophical Lodge explanation in the Knight of the Sun degree uses alchemical terms. See the Latomia Foundation website: http://www.latomia.org, document 121-t-e (Password protected).

5. Taylor and Francis, *British Freemasonry*, 1717-1813, eds. R. Péter and J. Snoek (Oxford: Routledge), xiv. Kindle Edition.

6. Yves-Max Viton, *Le rite écossais ancien et accepté* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2012), 72.

7. The word "cabalistic" means something pertaining to the Kabala, which refers to the Hebrew word meaning "received lore." This philosophical tradition was developed by certain Jewish Rabbis and was based on a mystical interpretation of

scriptures and was revealed by means of symbols and allegories. These in turn were designed not to confound or confuse, but rather to deter those whose interests where sacrilege to the holy and revered concepts of the Hebrews. There are Christian applications of the cabalistic system of symbols and allegories: the Greek word *ichthus* (ἰχθῦς) means "fish" and both were symbols for Christ. ἰχθῦς, or IXΘY is a cabalistic word as the letters stand for words themselves. In this case, the word composes a motto, which translated into English, reads, "Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior."

8. This phrase, or one similar, appears in several Webb-influenced Masonic Master Mason lectures.

9. For an excellent article on French fascination with the Holy Sepulchre, see Pierre Mollier, "The Masonic orders of the Holy Sepulchre in Eighteenth-Century France," *Ritual, Secrecy, and Civil Society*, Volume 3, Number 2, Fall 2015 (Policy Studies Organization), 20 et seq.

10. *Résumé of the Rituals of the Collection Maçonnerie des Hommes* (rev'd ed.) Kloss MS, XXXIV – 1-5, volume 3 (Helmond, The Netherlands: The Latomia Foundation, 1995), v-5, (document 13-0-f), a precis of which was published in English in A de Hoyos, "The Posthumous Success of James H.C. Miller, Degree Peddler," *Heredom 8*, (1999-2000): 194 –195. This degree was translated for the author from the original French by Shelley Reece, 3°, of Torrance, California, excerpts from which follow in the text of this article.

11. Ibid., 3. There are other such Holy Sepulchre degree manuscripts for about the same period which all generally have the same elements. See Pierre Mollier, "The Masonic orders of the Holy Sepulchre in Eighteenth-Century France," *Ritual, Secrecy, and Civil Society*, Volume 3, Number 2, Fall 2015 (Policy Studies Organization), 20 et seq. A degree of *Chevaliers du Saint Sépulcre* is the fiftieth in the sixth series of the Fifth Order of the French Rite. The degrees of the Fifth Order are sometimes referred to as part of the Metropolitan Chapter of France.

12. *Résumé of the Rituals of the Collection Maçonnerie des Hommes* (rev'd ed.) Kloss MS, XXXIV – 1-5, volume 3 (Helmond, The Netherlands: The Latomia Foundation, 1995), v-5, (document 13-0-f), 6.)

13. Translated from Latin, *adjutorium nostrum in nomine domini*: "Our help is in the name of the Lord." Translated from Latin, *salvum fac servum tuum*: "Save your servant." These two phrases were used in the Roman Missal during the episcopal or pontifical blessing at the end of Mass of the Roman Rite celebrated by a bishop.

14. *Kenning's Masonic Encyclopedia* (edited by Rev. A.F.A. Woodford) (London: George Kenning, 1878), 387.

15. *Résumé of the Rituals of the Collection Maçonnerie des Hommes* (rev'd ed.) Kloss MS, XXXIV – 1-5, volume 3 (Helmond, The Netherlands: The Latomia Foundation, 1995), v-5, (document 13-0-f).

16. The church was destroyed by a fire in May 614, when Khosrau II of the Sassanid Empire invaded Jerusalem and captured the True Cross. Emperor Heraclius rebuilt the church in 630 after recapturing the city.

17. This sentence appears to be a condensation of events occurring over a span of ninety years. The church was destroyed by the caliph al-Hākim Bī-Amr Allāh, circa 1009. Permitted by a treaty between al-Hakim's son Ali az-Zahir and Byzantine Emperor Romanos III, the church was reconstructed c. 1042 to 1048 by the Byzantine emperor Constantine IX Monomachus who reigned from 1042 to 1055. Jerusalem was recaptured in 1099 from the Fatimid Caliphate during the First Crusade, of which Godfrey of Bouillon was one of the leaders. It would appear that Constantine IX Monomachus was being referenced by the term *l'empereur consard* in the original text. (He ascended to power as the husband of one of the two co-empresses at the time.) Alternatively, could the reference be to Frederick II, the Holy Roman Emperor? He has been referred to as the *l'empereur-croisade* and was King of Jerusalem from 1225 to 1228. However, his involvement with Jerusalem was well after 1099.

18. See "The Early Grand Rite of Scotland: Seventh Degree to Twenty-Seventh Degree," *Collectanea* 10, part 3 (1976): 214.

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Due to ongoing COVID-19 regulations, these events may be postponed or canceled. Please check each website for up-to-date information

| EVENT | DATE | LOCATION | FOR MORE INFORMATION |
|---|---|---|---|
| Midwest Conference on Masonic Education | April 24, 2021 | ONLINE | http://masoniceducationconference.com |
| Quatuor Coronati Virtual Lecture | May 13, 2021 | ONLINE (Advance Registration Required) | https://www.quatuorcoronati.com/meetings/next-meeting/ |
| World Conference on Fraternalism, Social Capital, and Civil Society | May 27–29, 2021 | Bibliothèque National, Paris, France (and also online) | https://www.ipsonet.org/conferences/ritualconference-main |
| Masonic Library and Museum Association Annual Meeting | September 10–11, 2022 | Grand Rapids, MI | http://masonic-libraries.com/tag/annual-conference/ |
| Grand Lodge of California Masonic Speakers Series | Through 2021 | ONLINE | https://freemason.org/speakerseries/ |
| Open Lectures on Freemasonry | Through 2021 | ONLINE | openlfm.org |
| Masonic Awareness @ the Speed of Light (M.A.T.S.O.L.) Video Series | Ongoing | ONLINE | https://www.matsol.info |
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